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| 1. Annotate the article to show evidence of understanding and thinking. 2. Write a 1-page response that includes an introduction with a thesis, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion.  * How much should public agencies be allowed to oversee parenting choices? Explain. * What do you think are reasonable ages to grant children various levels of independence? Explain. * Pick another way to respond to the article. |

**‘Unsubstantiated’ child neglect finding for free-range parents**

By Donna St. George, *Washington Post,* March 2, 2015

The Maryland parents investigated for letting their young children walk home by themselves from a park were found responsible for “unsubstantiated” child neglect in a decision that has not fully resolved their clash with authorities over questions of parenting and children’s safety.

Danielle and Alexander Meitiv hoped the nationally debated case — which has lit up social media and brought a dozen television film crews to their Silver Spring home — would be dismissed after a two-month investigation by Montgomery County Child Protective Services.

But the finding of unsubstantiated child neglect means CPS will keep a file on the family for at least five years and leaves open the question of what would happen if the Meitiv children get reported again for walking without adult supervision.

The parents say they will continue to allow their son, Rafi, 10, and daughter Dvora, 6, to play or walk together, and won’t be swayed by the CPS finding.

“We don’t feel it was appropriate for an investigation to start, much less conclude that we are responsible for some form of child neglect,” said Danielle Meitiv, who said she and her husband plan to appeal and worry about being investigated again by CPS.

“What will happen next time?” she asked. “We don’t know if we will get caught in this Kafkaesque loop again.”

The case dates to Dec. 20, when police picked up the two Meitiv children walking in Silver Spring on a Saturday afternoon after someone reported them. The parents said that they gradually let the pair take walks on their own and that their children knew the area, which is along busy Georgia Avenue.

The Meitivs said they would not have allowed the one-mile outing from Woodside Park to their home if they did not feel their children were up to it. The siblings made it halfway before police stopped them.

The Meitivs’ decision letter, dated Feb. 20, said the CPS investigation had been completed and would be closed. It cited a finding of unsubstantiated child neglect and made note of an appeals process.

Montgomery County Child Protective Services officials referred calls Monday to state officials. Paula Tolson, spokeswoman for the Maryland Department of Human Resources, said the state cannot comment on specific cases because of confidentiality requirements.

Tolson said as a general practice, CPS officials in Maryland reach one of three possible findings after neglect investigations: ruled out, unsubstantiated or indicated.

An unsubstantiated finding is typically made when CPS has some information supporting a conclusion of child neglect, or when seemingly credible reports are at odds with each other, or when there is insufficient information for a more definitive conclusion, she said.

Tolson said a conference involving a CPS supervisor is the first step of the appeals process in cases of unsubstantiated neglect. It can often resolve some issues, she said.

Asked how authorities would respond if the children were reported again for walking unsupervised, she said CPS would become involved if a complaint was made about the safety of the children. In such cases, “if we get a call from law enforcement or from a citizen, we are required to investigate. Our goal is the safety of children, always.”

The Meitivs’ case has produced strong reactions about what constitutes responsible parenting, how safe children really are and whether the government overstepped its role.

The Meitivs, both scientists by training, embrace a “free-range” philosophy of parenting, believing that children learn self-reliance by being allowed to make choices, build independence and progressively experience the world on their own.

Though children have played unsupervised for generations, the so-called “free-range” movement goes back to 2008, when New York journalist Lenore Skenazy wrote a piece titled “Why I Let My 9-Year-Old Ride the Subway Alone.”

Skenazy, who developed a following for pushing back against what many see as a culture of helicopter parenting, said Monday that the Meitiv case follows others that raise similar issues but that it became the “walk heard round the world.”

“I think it has shifted the national narrative,” she said, suggesting that people have reacted with more concern about government intrusion and less focus on predator danger.

“The go-to narrative in the last 20 or 30 years for parents was, ‘Take your eyes off your kid for even a second and he’ll be snatched.’ What the Meitiv case did was pivot the story to: ‘Give your kid one second of freedom and the government will arrest you.’ ”

Russell Max Simon, co-founder of Empower Kids Maryland, created just after the Meitiv case became public in January, called the CPS decision “flat-out ridiculous” for holding parents responsible for an unsubstantiated claim.

“All of us were hoping sanity would prevail and they would drop it,” he said. “My feeling is that CPS should not have been involved in this in the first place.”

The Meitivs received the CPS letter last week, they said, but consulted with a lawyer before speaking publicly.

Danielle Meitiv said when she first read the decision, she felt numb. As she reread it, she recalled turning to her husband and saying: “Oh my God, they really believe we did something wrong.”

“I was kind of horrified,” she said, adding: “You try as a parent to do what’s right. Parents try so hard. Even though I know they are wrong, it’s a painful judgment.”

She said that while the terminology of being “found responsible” for “unsubstantiated child neglect” is difficult to interpret, she and her husband do not feel they have been cleared in the case. She called the decision inconceivable and outrageous.

“There’s no question this is some kind of finding against us,” she said.

The Meitivs say they have let their children walk together to a park a block away, to a nearby 7-Eleven and to a library three-quarters of a mile from their house. Lately the children walk home from their school bus stop.

They say that when CPS started its investigation, on the day of their children’s walk from the park, Alexander Meitiv was asked to sign a form saying he would not leave the children unsupervised until CPS followed up. When he resisted, saying he wanted to talk to a lawyer, he was told that if he did not sign, the children would be removed, the Meitivs said.

CPS officials have said they are guided in part by a state law that says children younger than 8 must be left with a reliable person who is at least 13. The law addresses children locked or confined in a building, dwelling, motor vehicle or other enclosed space, but does not mention children outdoors on a walk.

Danielle Meitiv said that in spite of the decision, her children played at a nearby park by themselves Monday, when schools were closed for the snow day. They came home with a lost dog, and the family found its owner.